

ADVENT

READING GUIDE

How to Use the Advent Reading Guide

This Advent reading guide is meant to prepare your hearts to celebrate God's Savior at Christmas. Each day, there will be a passage from the Old Testament that points forward to the coming Messiah, and the commentary will explain how Jesus fulfilled that expectation. While you are reading each day, think about the greatness of the promises and prophecies that God made to the world to save us from all of our greatest problems. Before Jesus came to earth, all anyone had was expectation and hope. Once expectation met the reality of God becoming flesh and dwelling among us, many erupted in the greatest sacrifices of praise that could ever be imagined. This good news, this gospel, was the climax of the greatest story ever told, with enough power and glory to lead us to celebrate now with the same fervor as those who saw it first hand then.

01 Pray for Wisdom

Paul says that only the Spirit can know the deep things of God (1 Cor. 2:10-11), and James says that it is God who gives wisdom (James 1:5). So, praying to God for wisdom in studying his word is essential to Bible reading.

02 Read the Passage/Commentary

Read the verses selected, and try to interpret them on your own. Then, after you have thought about them, read the commentary for the day to see if there were some things that you missed.

03 Pray the Bible

Were there things that the passage told you about God that you can praise and thank him for? Were there things taught about the Christian life that you struggle to obey? Pray for the desire and the strength to obey those things.

Read Genesis 3:13-15

13 Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." 14 The Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. 15 I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

Advent is all about putting ourselves into the mindset of waiting and expectation for the Messiah (which means "savior"). During this time, we prime our hearts for celebrating his birth on Christmas day in fullness. Today is a day of firsts. It's the first day of December, and Genesis 3:15 is known as the Protoevangelium, which means "first gospel" in Latin. It is the first time that there is an announcement that there would be someone born of a woman who would strike a death blow to the serpent, the one who deceived Adam & Eve and sent the whole world into the slavery of sin and death. The world was then put into expectation for this son who would bring the final victory over everything that ails the world—disease, hatred, famine, sexual abuse, violence, oppression, etc. But notice that this serpent also would strike the heel of the son. There was a time when Satan probably thought he had won. He had injected his poison into the Son by having him killed by crucifixion. But this Son would rise again, crushing the serpent for good. When will the serpent finally receive his lethal head wound? Paul says, "soon" (Rom. 16:20). How will he be crushed? He will be crushed by the body of Christ, the church, washing in the blood of Jesus and holding firmly to the gospel (Rev. 12:9, 11).

Read Genesis 12:1-3

1 Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

The call of Abram is one of the most important events in all of the Bible. It proclaims the foundational promise to Abraham that "all the families of the earth [Jews and Gentiles] will be blessed" in him. God reached in, during a time when it seemed that the whole world (probably even Abraham himself) was pagan (Joshua 24:2) and called Abraham for himself. In Genesis 17:6-8, we can see that this covenant of God for universal blessing would extend to Abraham's offspring, which was pointing to the Messiah, as Paul taught in Galatians 3:16. Those who were longing for the Messiah were waiting for God's promise of blessing. Acts 3:25-26 implies that this blessing that was to come to all nations in Abraham came through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Read Genesis 49:8-12

8 "Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you. 9 Judah is a lion's cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up, He stooped down; he crouched as a lion and as a lioness; who dares rouse him? 10 The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. 11 Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he has washed his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes. 12 His eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk.

Before Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, died, he made prophetic blessings over his sons. Today's passage is the blessing he made over Judah. The central point of this blessing for our purposes is the part that says "the scepter," which is something that a king would possess, "shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the people." From the tribe of Judah, there would be an ultimate king who would come and rule over all the peoples. Hebrews 7:14 states that Jesus is from the tribe of Judah, and Paul in Romans 1:5 says that his mission is to bring about the obedience of the nations, which is faith in the Messiah. Notice that it says Judah is a lion's cub (v. 9). Revelation 5:5 says that Jesus is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. He is the ruler who rode on the donkey's colt (v. 11; Mark 11:1-7). He is the messianic warrior whose robe is dipped in blood (v. 11; Revelation 19:13).

Read Exodus 12:21-27

21 Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Go and select lambs for yourselves according to your clans, and kill the Passover lamb. 22 Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. None of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning. 23 For the Lord will pass through to strike the Egyptians, and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you. 24 You shall observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons forever. 25 And when you come to the land that the Lord will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service. 26 And when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' 27 you shall say, 'It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.'" And the people bowed their heads and worshiped.

In all reality, no one was looking for a Messiah who would replace the Passover lamb. But what people were looking for was a Messiah who would protect them from God's condemnation and the sentence of eternal death separated from him. The last of the ten plagues in Exodus was when God struck the first-born son of every person and every animal in the land of Egypt that did not live in a house with a doorframe splattered with the blood of a spotless, sacrificial lamb. The death of the lamb took the place of the first-born son. A good king, a good messiah, is one who gives his life for his people. And that is what Jesus did. Upon his arrival to ministry, John the Baptist declared, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Jesus, the pure and spotless lamb, was sacrificed to take our place (1 Corinthians 5:7). He has protected us from the wrath of God that is coming upon the disobedient of this world (1 Peter 1:18-19).

Read Numbers 21:6-9

6 Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. 7 And the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. 8 And the Lord said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." 9 So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

It's really interesting to ponder that the biggest thing that we need God to save us from is God himself. But that is exactly what is happening here. If you were to go read verses 4 and 5, you'd see that the Lord has sent serpents as a judgment on the people for their complaining about being in the wilderness. In order to be saved from these serpents, God tells Moses to make a bronze serpent and to lift it up on a pole for all to see. Whoever looked at it would live. Jesus relates himself to this golden serpent: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (John 3:14-15). Jesus, being lifted up on the cross, is the divinely appointed means of saving us from God's wrath against our sin (Romans 3:21-25).

Read Numbers 24:15-19

15 And he took up his discourse and said, "The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor, the oracle of the man whose eye is opened, 16 the oracle of him who hears the words of God, and knows the knowledge of the Most High, who sees the vision of the Almighty, falling down with his eyes uncovered: 17 I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth. 18 Edom shall be dispossessed; Seir also, his enemies, shall be dispossessed. Israel is doing valiantly. 19 And one from Jacob shall exercise dominion and destroy the survivors of cities!"

Similar to Jacob's prophecies over 400 years earlier in Genesis 49, Balaam the prophet (who was not faithful to God but God used as his prophet anyways), predicted that a ruler would arise out of Israel who would destroy all of the enemies of God's people and he would rise like a star. In a strange fulfillment of prophecy, Matthew 2:2 records the wise men saying this, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." Here we see the wise men associating the star with the coming of the king of the Jews. Jesus himself would refer to himself as the bright morning star in Revelation 22:16. When Jesus was on the earth, those who believed he was the Messiah expected him to conquer the Romans and set Israel as the leader of the world. But what they didn't see was that there were much greater enemies that the Messiah needed to deal with.

Read Deuteronomy 18:15-19

15 “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers— it is to him you shall listen— 16 just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.’ 17 And the Lord said to me, ‘They are right in what they have spoken. 18 I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. 19 And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.’

Many people at the time of Jesus expected a prophet to rise up among them because of this prophecy. That’s why when people started to see the signs that Jesus was doing, they said, “This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!” (John 6:14). It’s interesting that the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt for 400 years with no word from God except the earlier promise to Abraham that he would deliver them out (Genesis 15:13-14). God brought his word back to his people through Moses and delivered them out of Egypt. In shockingly the same way, the last Old Testament book was written about 400 years before Christ came. At the time, there was no word from God, and people were enslaved not only to Rome but to the greater powers of sin and death. Yet, there was this standing divine promise that a prophet like Moses would come and, on top of that, there was all the promises concerning the Messiah who would come to rescue them. Like Moses, Jesus gave the teaching of God from the mountain (Matthew 5:1) and God declared, “This is my beloved son; listen to him” (Mark 9:6). This is why the apostles taught that it was Jesus who was the Prophet (Acts 3:19-23).

Read 2 Samuel 7:12-16

12 When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, 15 but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. 16 And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.”

Many of those who were expecting the Messiah at the time of the first century thought that this was a foundational passage for who the Messiah would be—a king from the line of David. This son of David would have his kingdom established forever and would build a house for the name of God (v. 13, 16). He will be God’s son (v. 14). In fact, this is the very passage that we should look to when we see Jesus referred to as the Son of God. We know that Jesus is the Son, the second person of the Trinity, but when the designation Son of God is used, it particularly is pointing to the reality that Jesus is the Messiah who was promised to come. “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:32-33). Now, many have rejected 2 Samuel 7 as a prophecy of Jesus because he never committed iniquity (v. 14), but he was surely beaten with rods (Mark 15:9) and took the stripes of the whip (Mark 15:15). But it was not for his own iniquity. God placed upon him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:6). And through his death and resurrection, he builds believers into a house for God through the Spirit (Ephesians 2:22).

Read Psalm 2

1 Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? 2 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying, 3 "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us." 4 He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. 5 Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, 6 "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill." 7 I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. 8 Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. 9 You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." 10 Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. 11 Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. 12 Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

There are certain Psalms that are obviously direct prophecy about the Messiah and some that are a bit more subtle. This is one of the direct ones. Psalm 2 was originally written in Hebrew, but when it was translated to Greek in about 200 B.C., verse 2 read: "against the Lord and against his Christ (christos)." Christ means "anointed one" and particularly here, the one who is anointed by God as king. It was because of this idea that the Messiah would be the appointed king of God that the term Christ became a term which represented the Messiah. So, when Peter made the good confession (Matthew 16:16) that Jesus was the Christ, he was proclaiming his belief that Jesus was God's anointed King and Messiah. Acts 4:25-28 show that the apostles thought verses 1 and 2 were fulfilled in all the people who were involved in putting Jesus to death. But God laughed (v. 4) at this because it was all a part of his plan! The crucifixion of the Son was the end of the rule of all the other forces of the world. In raising Jesus from the dead, God declared Jesus to be his Son (v. 7; Acts 13:33); The truly jaw-dropping note about this Psalm is that Jesus says in Revelation 2:26-28, "The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father." What is to be given to the Anointed King in Psalm 2, he will share with his people.

Read Psalm 16:8-11

8 I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. 9 Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. 10 For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption. 11 You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Many have wondered about the nature of this Psalm because there doesn't seem to be much talk about resurrection in the Old Testament. So how can David say that he would not see corruption? But we now know that this was written about the coming Messiah. Let's let the apostles in Acts 2 give the commentary on this verse for us: "Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses" (Acts 2:29-32). Amen.

Read Psalm 22

1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? 2 O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest. 3 Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. 4 In you our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. 5 To you they cried and were rescued; in you they trusted and were not put to shame. 6 But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people. 7 All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; 8 "He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!" 9 Yet you are he who took me from the womb; you made me trust you at my mother's breasts. 10 On you was I cast from my birth, and from my mother's womb you have been my God. 11 Be not far from me, for trouble is near, and there is none to help. 12 Many bulls encompass me; strong bulls of Bashan surround me; 13 they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion. 14 I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; 15 my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death. 16 For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet— 17 I can count all my bones—they stare and gloat over me; 18 they divide my garments among them, and for my

clothing they cast lots. 19 But you, O Lord, do not be far off! O you my help, come quickly to my aid! 20 Deliver my soul from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dog! 21 Save me from the mouth of the lion! You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen! 22 I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you: 23 You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him, and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel! 24 For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him. 25 From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will perform before those who fear him. 26 The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the Lord! May your hearts live forever! 27 All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you. 28 For kingship belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations. 29 All the prosperous of the earth eat and worship; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, even the one who could not keep himself alive. 30 Posterity shall serve him; it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation; 31 they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn, that he has done it.

There is not much we have to say about this passage to be amazed. We cannot read it without thinking of the crucifixion. But this psalm was written 1000 years before Jesus was even born and almost that much before crucifixion was invented. None of David's history elsewhere in the OT points to a situation in David's life similar to this. This seems to be another prophetic writing of David speaking of the Messiah. This Psalm was pivotal in how the gospel writers saw and wrote about Jesus' death (see especially Matthew 27:32-50; John 19:24).

Read Psalm 110:1-4

1 The Lord says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool." 2 The Lord sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies! 3 Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power, in holy garments; from the womb of the morning, the dew of your youth will be yours. 4 The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek."

The Messiah will certainly rule over the nations, and his people will offer themselves to him in holiness. Many at the time of Jesus thought this Psalm was about a son of David (which makes sense, since the Messiah was to be a son of David). But Jesus himself challenged this, asking how this passage could be about a son of David when David calls him "Lord" (Matthew 22:43). Of course, if it was a son of David who was also God, then the passage makes sense. The apostles themselves said that this passage was about Jesus (Acts 2:34-36). Not only would this Messiah be a King, but he would also be a priest! This is also said to be true about Jesus in Hebrews 5:5-10. And looking at our whole study so far, we can see where many theologians have seen the character of the Messiah as prophet, priest, and king.

Read Psalm 118:19-24

19 Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord. 20 This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it. 21 I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. 22 The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. 23 This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. 24 This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

This is a fascinating prophecy of the Messiah. Upon first reading, no one would associate the One to come with the gate of righteousness. But Jesus says that he is the door in which the sheep enter into God's pasture (John 10:7-10). Not only would the Messiah be the victorious king, winning salvation for his people; he himself would be that salvation. He would be the answer to the world's groanings. Many who are trying to build their way to God reject him. But he's the cornerstone, the key foundational piece that any structure needs to survive the storm of God's wrath. 1 Peter 2:7-8 says that those who rejected the cornerstone do so because they did not believe the word about Jesus, the gospel.

Read Isaiah 7:14

14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

This one is simple, famous, and profound. The promised one of God would be born of a virgin, and his name, Immanuel, points to who he would be. He would be "God with us." The coming of the Messiah would be filled with wonder and mystery. The gospel of Matthew picks this up in chapter 2: "And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet" (v. 19-22).

Read Isaiah 9:1-2

1 But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. 2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.

The tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali were among the first to fall to the Assyrian empire and brought into exile. This was a time of great darkness. But at the very place there was darkness, there would be a great light. This light will shine beyond the Jordan and in the Galilee area (which is equivalent to the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali). And this light would not be for Jews only, but it would happen in "Galilee of the nations." Matthew shows us Jesus' fulfillment of this: 4:13-14: "And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled." But not only would he be the light there, he would be the light of the world (John 1:9).

Read Isaiah 11:1-5

1 There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. 2 And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. 3 And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, 4 but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. 5 Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

The coming Messiah would be a descendant of David, and he would be filled with the Spirit of God in every way imaginable. He will rule as a good king, breaking the bonds of oppression and finally, with equity, giving justice to the poor and the meek. He will not be a passive ruler, but he will destroy the enemies of God, living eternally in righteousness and holiness. Many of our visions of Jesus are far too small. Jesus, our loving friend, is also the righteous king who is to be feared. Let's look at two passages in Revelation that will show us this resplendent king. Look for the echoes of Isaiah 11. "And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals." . . . Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords" (Revelation 5:5; 19:11-16).

Read Isaiah 42:1-7

1 Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. 2 He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; 3 a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. 4 He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law. 5 Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it: 6 "I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, 7 to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.

The servant of the Lord, the Messiah, would not be someone who would try to bring acclaim to himself, nor would he hurt those who were already hurting (v. 3). He is for justice for the whole world. He will finally bring sight to those who are blind to God's truth and to set those who are enslaved free. Matt. 12:14-16 says that it is Jesus who fulfills this passage: "But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him. Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. And many followed him, and he healed them all and ordered them not to make him known. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah." Many have found tremendous comfort in the phrase "a bruised reed he will not break," which shows the great gentleness of our Savior.

Read Isaiah 53:7-9

7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. 8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? 9 And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.

No one expected a suffering Messiah/King. No one considered this passage to be about the Anointed one, but perhaps another person who would suffer for Israel. Certainly not the Christ who was supposed to be the victorious king! But how ironic is it that Isaiah 53 is now probably the most popular passage that we look to in the Old Testament that points to Jesus? Peter in 1 Peter 2:21-24 is confident that this is about Jesus' death and burial. Is it not also fascinating that verse 9 says that the suffering servant's grave was made with a rich man, and that Matthew records that Joseph of Arimathea was a rich man who laid Jesus in the tomb that he owned (Matthew 27:57-60)?

Read Isaiah 61:1-2

1 The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; 2 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn.

Today, we need to simply just read Luke's account of this for the commentary: "And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:17-21). Behold your Savior.

Read Jeremiah 31:31-34

31 "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, 32 not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. 33 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34 And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

This is another one of those less obvious texts, but on this side of the gospel, we realize that it is through the Messiah that God would bring in the New Covenant. Israel had broken the Old Covenant, but God does not give up on his people. Instead of giving them a new law on tablets of stone, the New Covenant is when God will place the law on their hearts by his Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:3). No longer would the Law stand outside God's people to condemn them to death but would be active inside them leading to life. And in this New Covenant, there is no fear of condemnation through remaining indwelling sin because the New Covenant is a covenant in the blood of Christ through which God forgives our iniquity and remembers our sin no more (Luke 22:14-20).

Read Daniel 7:13-14

13 “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. 14 And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

While many didn't believe in a suffering Messiah, they did look at this passage and consider that this vision of the son of man was talking about the one to come. When Jesus used the title “son of man,” he wasn't just pointing out that he was human but that those who were listening to him were supposed to associate him with the one prophesied about in Daniel 7 who would receive everlasting dominion over all peoples, nations, and languages. Jesus himself made this connection in Mark 14:62: “And Jesus said, ‘I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.’”

Read Amos 9:11-12

11 “In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old, 12 that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name,” declares the Lord who does this.

There is some deep symbolism here that we should catch. We should see the “booth of David” as David's kingdom and his rule over his enemies. During the time of the Israelite exile from Jerusalem (before Christ came), it appeared that God's promises to David and his son's eternal dominion were failing. No one even really knew if there was a Davidic king out in the world. And James used this passage in Acts 15:15-17 to show that Jesus was not only the restoration of David's booth/tent, but was a signal that the nations would now be welcomed into the kingdom of David's son.

Read Micah 5:2

2 But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.

Here is a prophecy that's a bit easier to decipher. The Messiah would come from Bethlehem, but this person was also someone whose rise to power was something prophesied a long time ago (as we have seen all throughout this study). Matthew 2:1-6 confirms this to be about Jesus.

Read Zechariah 9:9

9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

I don't know if there is a more perfect verse for Christmas eve. If God's people would have known that the Messiah was on the horizon in late B.C., it would have been a time of great rejoicing. But they were expecting a proud, warrior king; however, the true Messiah would be humble. Let us rejoice today, for our Savior is at the doorstep.

Read Luke 1:67-79

67 And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, 68 “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people 69 and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, 70 as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, 71 that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; 72 to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, 73 the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us 74 that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, 75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. 76 And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, 77 to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, 78 because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high 79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

Merry Christmas! This is one of my favorite passages that point to how Zechariah, John the Baptist's father, praised God for finally bringing his salvation into the world in his day. If we have a solid grasp on the OT, this prayer of thanks should resonate strongly with our hearts today. God has finally come and redeemed his people (v. 68), he did this through raising up someone from the house of David as he always promised (vv. 69-70). This was done in remembrance of his covenant with Abraham (vv. 72-73). The result is so that we might be able to serve God without fear of our enemies (sin and death, which were separating us from God and his holiness) (v. 74). This salvation brings us holiness and righteousness (v. 75). John the Baptist would prepare the way for the Lord's coming and tell people that Jesus would forgive people of their sins because of God's mercy (vv. 77-78), which would be a light to those in darkness and a guide to the land of peace (v. 78-79).